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The Arrival of French Wounded From Prison Camps

BY WILLIAM T. MARTIN.

It is an interesting gathering, the crowd standing there in the cold, rainy dawn of the breaking February morning, anxiously peering through the great door of the Paris railroad station. It is dark and hollow inside except for the murky, yellow glare of a few dirty electric bulbs strung over the high ceiling.

On all the faces there is a look of strained eagerness, subdued to the point of pain. Something seems about to snap. It is an assorted crowd. Almost every human type is represented. There are old and young of both sexes—all clad, well clad, richly clad. Practically all wear some token of mourning and many are in deep black. A few very old women and men, too old to be tottering around alone, are de-

pending on others for support. Several have nobody to help them and are doing as they can, leaning on canes or against the wall of the station. Here and there a child hugs the folds of its mother's dress or a woman stands with a baby.

They are awaiting the arrival of the second "grande blessée" train of the war. French soldiers taken in attacks, and held for months as prisoners of war, their identities lost in the prison camps of Germany and finally given up as hopelessly maimed and forever unfit for further military service, are being sent back. The train is now expected in a few minutes. It is a special train from Switzerland.

The throng at the door represents

PATHETIC Scenes as the Trains Bearing Injured Soldiers Arrive—Home-Coming of French Soldiers Taken in Attack and Held Prisoners for Months by the Germans. Their Identities Lost in Prison Camps and They Are Declared Unfit for Further Military Service—How the Wounded Are Cared For—The Search for Missing Relatives.



MOTHERS WITH THEIR BABIES AT A RELIEF POST. THEY ARE EITHER WAR WIDOWS OR THEIR HUSBANDS ARE PRISONERS.

what might in a few minutes be the sweethearts, mothers, wives and the otherwise loved ones of the oncoming captives. Just now no one knows. They have been notified by the authorities, who have only names, and mere names, some have learned before, are deceptive. From the anxious faces it is evident that with the exception of a few the news is that of the resurrection of the dead.

The train will pull in at the far end of the station, and the huge room immediately inside is reserved for the ambulances of the various Red Cross societies that now ride up over the little incline before the door past the crowd and into the station. Inside, the drivers line up in order, the backs of the cars open and facing one another. Fresh ambulances continue to pull up to the little incline, and as the drivers and orderlies from their seats look into the crowd there are some who quickly turn their faces away, in the keenly sensitive manner of the French, that their emotions may not be seen.

Inside, as branderders and drivers stand and wait, it seems exceptionally quiet for so many persons. Occasionally the light rain can be heard falling on the high roof. Suddenly from a hall at the far end of a long, narrow corridor leading from the room where the ambulances are lined up comes word that the train is pulling into the yards. Instantly the room fills with the swish of many feet as the Red Cross people flock to the corridor and crowd through to the other side. The crowd outside is not allowed to enter.

The train finally pulls in—a long string of second-class cars of the Swiss type, distinguished from the French coaches by the characteristic bits of Swiss scenery inlaid along the walls of the compartments. It runs along the side of the station at the other end, under a shed.

Branderders line up along the dark narrow platform, lighted by a glaring incandescent here and there. Others carry heaps of blankets and stretchers which they pile at regular intervals along the platform.

As the train moves along, slowly and noiselessly, the ex-soldiers, stout men, are held back by gendarmes at the windows. Most of them seem to be able to stand up or remain in sit-

ting postures. The strongest crowd to the windows. Their faces, too, are strained and eager.

They are still in their uniforms and these they have apparently cleaned and mended after the long detention in the prison camps. Stuck in their caps and pinned on their chests are little flags, tri-colored tinsel and flowers, gifts received from Swiss children on their way through the country. In their eagerness to breathe the air, to see, hear or feel their fellowmen about them, the war's derelicts cram the windows until their doors are open.

It is a wonderful experience after indescribable hardships, they say. No one smiles.

The train stops and the doors are opened. It takes the greater part of an hour to unload the cars. The soldiers are led, carried, wheeled or supported into a vast waiting room near by at the corridor. Armless, sightless, legless, faceless, they are horribly disfigured, bent double and crippled in every conceivable way, they manage to hobble along with the help of the branderders, who call them endearing names and carry the piles of gaudy socks and little souvenirs of all sorts they have received in Switzerland or were allowed to bring over. They are the last word in broken beings. In their eagerness, a pitiful enthusiasm, they try their attendants with questions.

They were treated horribly, they declared on the train food and sometimes beaten. They are unanimous in saying this, but they say they received the best of treatment that that meted to the English prisoners. As they look in their weakness and misery some say foolish things.

"It is enough, this war. How long will it last, do you know?" asks a little, thin fellow with a shaggy beard and an armless sleeve pinned over his chest. He has a catch in his voice as of weakness. "They told us nothing in Germany. The dirtiest cover. Ah, it is good here, this place. I used to come here to see an aunt in the country. I was happy then. My mother, is she here?"

At the door through which they pass stand a line of officers and civilians of note, who salute and lift their hats to the homecomers. One fellow, wheeled along in a chair, with a leg and an arm missing, manages to hold onto a large French flag. It is frayed at the edges and much faded. It partly covers his body and the missing leg. He draws a solemn salute and a tear as he passes.

Finally the train is unloaded. All the soldiers are now assembled in the large room. The place is decorated with flowers, ferns and flags. There are long tables set in banquet style. The dishes are of tin, but the tables are spread with real linen and strewn with roses. At the plates are little tri-colored favors of divers types.

It is evident that the various Red Cross societies have concentrated their efforts to stretch the funds allotted to them.

The soldiers are arranged around the tables. Spottedly gowned nurses, with red crosses on their arms or caps, flit here and there and minister to the soldiers as if to so many children, patting them and saying nice little things as they stoop and pass from one to the other.

At the other end of the station the crowds still stand without the door. They are held back by gendarmes at both sides of the entrance. The pent up eagerness is now keyed to the highest pitch by the silence of the throng. It is a weighted, oppressive silence that now and then is broken by short waves of restlessness and a few low words here and there. Women fix little things about their dress, their hats or hair, and fingers twitch and fidget with handkerchiefs.

In the room of the tables there is also silence, and the men are beginning to nibble at their food.

Then it comes: From the far end of the corridor leading to where the crowd has waited comes a rumble, a swish of many feet and the officers and branderders gathered at the tables in silence turn to look.

The long string of parents, wives, sweethearts and children comes on steadily through the long, narrow passage toward the tables. Now the silence is tense and breathless. Not one in that sad, straining crowd is sure of a reunion. They come on with something that resembles a giant billow ready to break.

In the eagerness of expectancy the faces are painful to see. There is a woman with a baby in her arms and poorly dressed. An old man hobbles along with the aid of a cane, one hand feebly extended toward an elderly, stout woman, who pushes along in the lead. She has a face set for disappointment. Near her is a slight, gentle looking woman whose face is furrowed in deep lines and who tries to force an air of unconcern.

Three women pass and in their frantic eagerness to get at the tables push nervously through little openings in

the crowd. Everybody tries to look over the shoulders of those in front. All are looking in the same direction.

One can see much in a few seconds. There is a face on which is written the bitterness of disappointment, with a weary hopelessness as though the person, a woman, had been at similar gatherings before only to meet the anguish she now expects.

The people flock ahead and begin to walk along the tables. There is no sound but the swish of the feet. The soldiers sit motionless in their chairs in contained eagerness.

Suddenly a woman screams. Her screams rise to shrieks and as suddenly she is silent. She has fainted.

He stands on one leg and a wire substitute for the other. An arm clasped about the waist of the woman is handless. The soldier—he is very tall—bends over the woman stiffly and gives her a long passionate kiss. I shall never forget the look on his face. It is a smile, full of pain concealed, but a smile, and therein is written a knowledge of the dream of youth gone and the earnest ambitions of a little more than a year ago crushed in that one moment.

Much happens in the next few seconds. Loved ones are clasped with the eagerness of the long months of expectancy. Women rush from one end of the large room to the other, their little cries as they catch sight of the faces they seek.

The woman with the baby finds her husband. He sees the child for the first time. A soldier holds his sweetheart, but sees her not, for he is blind forever, so he feels her face and smiles. A woman rushes into a soldier's arms and suddenly recoils to make doubly sure of his identity. Part of his face has been shot away. But he can see, and he stands up and throws his arms about her. He can only mumble indistinctly from a semblance of a mouth. But he does his best.

Two women, fashionably clothed, try to cloak their eagerness with looks of unconcern as they pass from table to table showing a little photograph. But they meet only headshakes from the soldiers, and sad smiles. Still they pass on, going over the ground again and in to smile brightly, but their hearts are breaking. No one has seen him. Sometimes they look long and hard at some disfigured face before they are convinced and again pass on.

A slip of a girl goes up to one of the soldiers. He is crippled and as he sits still in his chair she bends over and kisses him on both cheeks. She speaks in a natural voice with little show of emotion for a minute. Suddenly, she thrusts herself full into the arms of the wounded man, cries, "Father!"

The soldier, not expecting the outburst, soothes the child as well as his crippled back will allow. The soldier says to the girl, "The way the girl has said it, will never leave me."

There is a lieutenant there. He wears dark-colored glasses to hide the fact that his eyes have been shot away. As he sits in his chair, nervously picking at a piece of cake, a pretty young woman stands by with her hand on his shoulder.

They were engaged, these two, when he left home full of hope and in a year he had returned a cripple. When he heard he was coming back he asked the authorities that his name be withheld from the list so his fiancée would be unaware of his return. But she had learned of his arrival, and is telling him that it makes no difference. The night now past, those of another life—he was a surgeon not long out of school and his was a big ambition. He thinks of this while the girl stands by.

In Germany he found a chance to learn how to make little useful things. In his bag are some articles he has made after much hard work and practice. But he can do these things better now, and easier, and he has a sudden hope.

Meanwhile the air is filled with little cries, a low, excited talking. There is relief after the pent-up anxiety of weary months and there are sobs as the soldiers find those they look for. Nurses tripping through the throngs, ministering here and there, smiling cheerfully, unexpectedly burst into sobs and hurry away as they see things not describable, while among the several hundred observers lined up along the tables at the tables, exultant and satisfied, having found those they were looking for. But there are still many who continue to pass among the long rows, stopping here and there or suddenly retracing their steps with a growing feeling of terrible disappointment as they scan and rescanned the faces

color flags from their breasts or caps and with feeble arms wave them as they cry out in voices shaken and feeble.

It takes some seconds for the cheering to die down. Here and there are soldiers who smile as they wave the little flags. It is with something of the eager patriotism of former days and on their faces is nothing of regret. They have sacrificed their all, but it has been for France, their country, and there is cause for pride in that. Such is the spirit of the French people.

The banquet over, the soldiers are taken to the waiting ambulances in the large room at the other end of the corridor. Their loved ones help them along as they still passionately kiss and clasp one another. They fill the ambulances one by one, and as the cars are filled they back out and leave for their destinations.

The cripples go to various hospitals and places prepared by the government, where they will learn trades and wifely attentions take care of them who will be visited by those they know. As the ambulances pass from the yards into the street people passing flock to the curbs, attracted by the sights from the rear ends of the ambulances—wounded soldiers bedecked in flags and gaudy material. They have never seen anything like it.

Back in the station, there are those who linger to the end, anxiously searching and researching the faces as the returned soldiers continue to pass through the corridor, are packed into the cars and are whisked away. But it seems in vain.

There is a woman in deep mourning who now fills the air with low, dry sobs. They telegraphed her that her husband was still alive and would be on the train. She came, filled with the joy of a hope, after those months of mourning for a loved one dead. Now they are forced to tell her it has been a mistake.

The shock would unbalance a stronger person, probably. But the little, frail woman in her weakness and misery, utter and hopeless, only looks on. There is nobody to comfort her. It is not forgettable—the absolute hopelessness and drawn misery cut into

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The Waltz of the Ostrich.

THE so-called waltzing of the ostrich consists of a rapid whirling movement, sometimes in one direction, sometimes in another, with the wings spread out and alternately elevated and depressed. A fascinating sight is presented by a large flock of the gigantic birds showing their good spirits by this strenuous dancing.

First one bird will dart forward and begin the circular movement; another will follow, and then another and another, until the entire flock is careening round in the mad whirl. Some will continue until they drop exhausted, or, apparently becoming giddy, stumble and fall.

The dance is seen at its best only when a considerable number of birds are together. Although it is often performed by a few only, it is never so intense or prolonged as when the flock is large.

Chicks only a month or two old engage in the amusement, although they are rather clumsy and sometimes stumble, particularly when they are reversing. As they grow older they learn to make several complete turns with facility, although even adult birds sometimes stumble and break their legs in falling.

This dance is no doubt instinctive. Ostrich chicks begin the whirl even when reared away from other ostriches, without the chance to see the performance.

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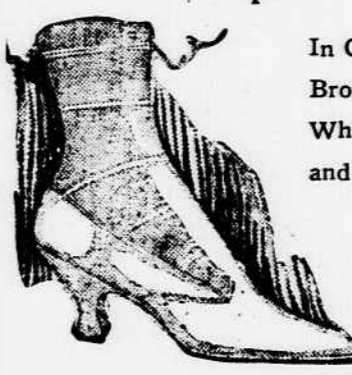
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